



HEALTH PROFILE: THAILAND

HIV/AIDS

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2003)	570,000
Total Population (2004)	63.465 million
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2003)	1.5%
HIV-I Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population most at risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections, or others with known risk factors)	12.9%
Population least at risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	1.6%

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

The earliest cases of AIDS in Thailand occurred among sex workers, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users. By 1989, HIV had spread into the general population, primarily through heterosexual intercourse between individuals who were engaging in unprotected sex. In 1991, Thailand recorded nearly 143,000 new HIV infections, which led the Thai government to take an aggressive approach to stopping the epidemic.

In 2000, HIV/AIDS prevalence in Thailand stood at 1.8%; by the end of 2003, this figure had dropped to 1.5%, with just slightly more than 20,000 new HIV infections being recorded each year. Although heterosexual intercourse still accounts for the majority of new infections (80%), homosexual and injecting drug use account for a significant proportion of new infections. HIV prevalence among injecting drug users remains unacceptably high (around 40%) and is one of the most significant challenges to controlling the spread of HIV.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

Thailand implemented extensive educational and media campaigns in the early 1990s geared toward the wider public as well as those who were most at risk for HIV infection: sex workers and their clients, men who have sex with men (MSM), and injecting drug users. Encouraging men to curb their visits to brothels, promoting widespread condom use in brothels, and instituting health regulations for handheld records for sex workers and mandatory monthly sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening—along with better treatment for STIs—have contributed to a sharp drop in the rate of new HIV infections.

Thailand has received wide recognition for leading one of the world's most successful HIV prevention campaigns. Its approach was threefold. First, Thailand's political leaders recognized the devastating scale of the epidemic and were willing to openly discuss HIV/AIDS. Second, the government addressed the epidemic from prevention and treatment perspectives alike. Third, Thai officials tackled the epidemic from cultural, economic, human, and social aspects and, from the beginning, encouraged involvement by everyone in Thai society, from the highest levels to the grass roots.

The National AIDS Prevention and Alleviation Committee implements Thailand's HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment plan for the 2002–2006 period. The plan has three targets: 1) reduce adult HIV prevalence to less

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than 1% by the end of 2006; 2) provide care and treatment services for at least 80% of people living with HIV/AIDS; and 3) engage local administrations and community organizations to plan and carry out HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation activities.

By July 2004, of the more than half-million Thais living with HIV, more than 236,000 individuals had developed AIDS. Of these, an estimated 120,000 adults aged 15–49 were in need of antiretroviral therapy. For the 2003–2007 period, Thailand is expected to receive \$209 million from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, primarily to provide antiretroviral drugs to persons living with HIV/AIDS. According to the Global Fund, UNAIDS, and the Thai government, the nation is well on its way to providing antiretroviral drugs to an estimated 70,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS by the end of 2005.

USAID SUPPORT

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is assisting Thailand to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic, primarily through the Mekong Regional HIV/AIDS Program that encompasses activities in Burma, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand, Vietnam, and two provinces in China. An interim regional HIV/AIDS strategy is in effect for the 2003–2006 period, which will be replaced by a five-year strategy for 2007–2012. USAID assistance to Thailand amounted to \$1.5 million in FY 2004.

USAID/Regional Development Mission in Asia (RDM/A) supports collaborative partnerships to develop a strategic information base and to foster evidence-based approaches that target most-at-risk populations who are located in hotspots where infectious transmission is most likely to occur. Economies of scale are fostered through the use of a “minimum services package.” Project activities implemented in Thailand offer an excellent testing ground for model interventions, with the goal of disseminating and replicating these interventions in others Asian countries. Activities receiving USAID support include the following:

- Targeted interventions focused on injecting drug users, MSM, and other high-risk populations, including peer and outreach education, HIV counseling and testing, condom distribution and marketing, targeted media, STI treatment, substitution therapy, and care and treatment services for those living with HIV/AIDS.
- HIV counseling and testing programs, along with efforts to reduce the rate of mother-to-child HIV transmission for migrant workers along the Thai-Burma border.
- An antiretroviral treatment model project in northern Thailand that is developing a clinical training curriculum for care providers, an adherence counseling curriculum, and a peer intervention curriculum.
- A positive partnership project that aims to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination in low income communities by improving the economic independence of people living with HIV/AIDS and their business partners through microcredit and income generation activities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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